

Paul the Evangelist

Romans 10

INTRODUCTION: In his book, “The Power of Habit,” Charles Duhigg writes that scientists are just beginning to discover the immense power of certain KEYSTONE habits. keystones are habits or actions that have a disproportionate influence on other decisions in your life.

- **Health** - People who really work out intently tend to make good eating choices, sleep better, have less stress and anxiety, and develop a stronger immune system, so they are more resistant to disease. Why? Because working out creates a chain of events. The other decisions come almost automatically when you get the Keystone correct.
- **Marriage** - Couples who regularly go on date nights tend to fight less, enjoy better intimacy, enjoy their marriage more, and divorce less. Why? Because dating your spouse is a keystone habit.

So you don’t have to MASTER dozens of disciplines - you really only need to understand and engage in a few healthy keystone habits, and it will create a cycle that will greatly improve your overall life.

NOW - what about Spirituality? Are there keystone habits that will cause the various disciplines to fall into place? What is one thing we can do that will cause us to love God and people more, pray more, serve more, give more, and have a greater impact for the Kingdom?

The one habit, from my experience and observation, that influences all the other disciplines the most is the habit of evangelism - that is, seeking to influence others with the Gospel.

Chances are, if we were conducting a survey of any given church in our bible belt culture, evangelism would probably rank as the weakest and least practiced of all spiritual disciplines.

But think about it. If you are actively engaged in winning other people to Christ from your circle of influence:

- You will sin less - because you don’t want to hinder your witness.
- You will pray more - because you are desperately needing God’s power.
- You will serve your church better- because you will look at your church totally differently when you see it through the eyes of outsiders.

If there was ONE THING that I could ask God for that I knew he would give us, it would be that every member of this church would be actively engaged in reaching outsiders. It would be a revolution at our two campuses.

CONTEXT: The last time we were together, we saw Paul’s deep concern for his kinsmen, the Jews. He went as far as to say that he would be willing to be cut off from Christ that they might be converted. This week we hear his Pastoral heart as he shares practical ways he seeks their conversion.

The first principle I observe is...

1. Effective Evangelism Prioritizes Prayer -

TEXT: Romans 10:1–4 (ESV)

¹ Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

The “them” in verse one refers to his Jewish countrymen. That great people who have been disproportionately successful in virtually every sector, but who have simultaneously failed to recognize the Messiah their forefathers prophesied. Paul says, “My heart’s desire and prayer to God is that they be saved.

What dominates your prayer life? Good health? Great wealth? Or the souls of men?

GREEK NOTE: “Heart’s desire” translates *eudokia*, a word that means the thing your heart runs to when nothing constrains it.

How different would life be for you if your overwhelming concern was the conversion of sinners through the Gospel?

Remember Chapter 9 said in no uncertain terms that Salvation was the work of the Sovereign Lord - however, if by they you fall into a fatalistic approach that says God will do what God will do, you do not understand Paul’s view of Sovereignty. Paul follows chapter 9 with the strongest language on evangelistic prayer in the New Testament.

ILLUSTRATION: I remember many years ago preaching at a Youth Camp in Florence, AL. After I preached, a young lady on the stage wept as she prayed. I motioned for Julie to pray with her... Julie prayed with her as she wept. The people left the room for lunch, but the girl continued praying. I knelt down and said, “May I ask what troubles you?” She answered, “My friend is here at this camp, and she’s lost, and she’s so stubborn; I just want her to get saved!” Now, I’m not proud of how I responded, but I said, “Listen, tonight I’ll preach again, and I’m preaching a sermon on Hell, and if she doesn’t get saved tonight, I don’t know what will work.” She hardly acknowledged my words and kept praying. I remember thinking as I worked on my sermon... oh, this will do it; this will break her stubborn spirit. I got there that evening loaded for bear. I remember seeing the young girl who was praying that morning. I said to her, “Well, are you ready?” She said Ready for what? Ready for you friend to get saved; I brought my hell sermon. She said, “Oh, preacher, she got saved right after lunch. God has answered my prayer! God didn’t need my sermon; he needed that teenage girl’s heart broken for her friend!

² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. ⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Notice that he honors what can be honored. "I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God." The word is **zēlos**, boiling heat, fervor. He does not mock their sincerity. He does not sneer at their devotion. ***Evangelism never begins with ridicule.***

He took the same approach in Athens when he said of those Idol worshippers, "I see that you are religious in every way".

But he is no flatterer; he tells the truth. Their zeal is "not according to knowledge."
You can be sincerely wrong and thus be sincerely lost.

ILLUSTRATION: Jesus warned in the parable of the four soils that **Matthew 13:19**
19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.

QUESTION: When you made your decision for salvation, did you understand what it was that you were doing? Did you understand it was all about what Jesus did, and nothing about what you had done? Did you comprehend the fact that He took your place in His death, burial, and resurrection?

That is the perspective effective evangelism holds in tension. We can honor the religious devotion of our neighbors, our Mormon co-worker, our devout friend who trusts her church membership, our moral, generous, unconverted family member. ***We do not belittle them. And at the same time we refuse to pretend that religion is salvation.***

Tim Keller said it well: *"A person will be about as good at Evangelism as they are at friendship."*

Effective Evangelism Prioritizes Prayer

2. Effective Evangelism Prohibits Performance -

⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. ⁵ For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them.

That means that if you intend to be good enough to go to Heaven, you must be perfectly good enough. No violations.

James 2:10–11 (ESV)

¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.

¹¹ For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

The issue is not WHAT sin you commit, but WHO you sin against - a Holy God.

⁶ But the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

Paul contrasts the impossibility of salvation by works with two other impossibilities: bringing Christ down from Heaven or up from Sheol. It is in a sense Holy Sarcasm and Paul used it frequently.

THINK REASONABLY, if you could wash your sins away with the waters of Baptism, why on earth would God allow the brutal slaughter of His beloved Son on a cruel Roman Cross? When Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, “Father, if there be any other way,” Heaven should have answered, “Oh Son, there are a thousand ways - they can clean up their act, join a church, be baptized.” But Heaven was utterly silent.

The law was given to show us the utter impossibility of achieving true righteousness.

It was not given as a ladder to climb but as a teacher to redirect. It comes alongside our lives and names what it finds.

- We shade the truth, and the law calls it lying.
- We take what is not ours, and the law calls it stealing.
- We simmer against a brother, and Jesus says the law calls it murder in the heart.
- We desire a person who is not ours; the Law condemns us as adulterers at heart.

You who plan to be saved by the keeping of the 10 commandments, do you keep them? Have you perpetually, always, worshipped God above yourself, your wants, your hobbies?

Effective Evangelism Prioritizes Prayer, Prohibits Performance...

3. Effective Evangelism Pursues the Heart -

⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Paul emphasizes that the conversion we are after isn't merely a change of mind, but it is a change of heart. The heart represents the inmost being, the eternal self. It is the place that words come from. **Matthew 12:34 (ESV)** ³⁴ ...For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

Whatever is in the well of the heart comes up in the bucket of the mouth. Thus if Jesus is truly in your heart as Lord, you will have no problem confessing that with your mouth.

ILLUSTRATION: Several years ago a young man approached me at a student event and said, “I got saved, but don’t tell anybody.” To which I answered, “It’s not my place to tell anybody, but why would you want to keep it a secret?” He answered, “Because my dad is a deacon and I don’t want people to know I was lost all this time.” I said, “Son, I think you underestimate your Father, but know that if Jesus is really in your heart, He will inevitably come out in your heart.”

GREEK NOTE: Two verbs. Homologeō, to confess, the same thing, to agree out loud with God about who Jesus is. And pisteuō, to believe, to trust, to rest your weight. One object: the risen Lord Jesus.

And do not miss where saving faith lives. "With the heart one believes." The word is kardia, and in Scripture the heart is almost never merely the feelings. The heart is the command center of the person, the innermost citadel, the real you beneath the roles you play.

WE MUST EARN THE RIGHT TO SPEAK TO THE INMOST PERSON:

1 Corinthians 9:19–23 (ESV)

¹⁹ For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

Effective Evangelism Prioritizes Prayer, Prohibits Performance, Pursues the Heart...

4. Effective Evangelism Proclaims the Gospel -

¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

It is a catchy saying attributed to Francis of Assisi, “Preach the Gospel at all times and if necessary use words.” That’s clever, but the fact is, it is always necessary to use words. No one comes to the knowledge of the Gospel by your good behavior.

Paul reasons backward from that promise in four relentless questions, and every link holds.

- They cannot call on one they have not believed.
- They cannot believe in one they have never heard.
- They cannot hear without a preacher.

- And there will be no preacher unless someone is sent.

Run the chain forward: God sends, the sent one proclaims, the hearer believes, the believer calls, the caller is saved. There is no missing link, and there is no alternate route. Salvation travels along this chain or it does not travel at all.

Paul seals it with **Isaiah 52:7**, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

Feet are not the glamorous part of the body. These were dusty, blistered, cracked feet on Roman roads. But Isaiah's watchman, seeing the runner cresting the hills with news that the exile was over, ***called those feet beautiful***. Beautiful because of what they carried.

The messenger may be utterly unimpressive in himself. It does not matter. He was once stopped at a roadblock by an ordinary man who cost him a long detour, and he obeyed without a word of argument, because the man wore the uniform of the state. All the authority behind the message was vested in the messenger. When you carry the gospel, you go in the uniform of the King.

Our English says, "how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?" But the Greek has no "of." It says, how are they to believe in him whom they have never heard.

When the gospel is truly proclaimed, people do not merely hear about Christ. They hear Christ. The risen Lord himself speaks in the voice of his messengers, which is exactly what Jesus promised: "The one who hears you hears me" (**Luke 10:16**).

Evangelistic Triggers:

- 1. Theological Ignorance** - Most of the witnessing opportunities we see in the New Testament began with a Christian biblically correcting someone's theological misunderstanding. Phillip and the Etheopian, Jesus and the woman at the well.
- 2. A Family Crisis** - Someone going through marriage difficulty, rebellious children. Those things should serve as triggers to you... Oh, perhaps I should invite this person to church. Perhaps I should share my faith.
- 3. A Life Transition** - This may be a divorce, or it may be a marriage; it could be the first child, the death of a loved one. It could be graduating high school or college. It could be someone just moving to the area.

Here is the principle: *The more disruptive a life event is to a person's psychological equilibrium, the more it will cause him/her to be spiritually receptive.*

Robert Pierson rightly observes:

People most often make decisions for Christ when they are going through transitions. Most do not tend to make decisions about new commitments and directions in their life when everything is going well. We make those decisions when we are in the midst of stress and difficulty.

ILLUSTRATION: Imagine a city swept by a fatal plague, and a team of men who possess the only cure, meeting to plan the announcement. One says, we need to spice this up, maybe surround it with a musical program. Another says, perhaps I should get a trendier look so the people will relate to me. You want to shout at them: ***men, they are dying, and you have the cure. Just tell them.***

Effective Evangelism Prioritizes Prayer, Prohibits Performance, Pursues the Heart, Proclaims the Gospel...

4. Effective Evangelism Practices Patience -

¹⁸ But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for “Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.” ¹⁹ But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, “I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.” ²⁰ Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, “I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.” ²¹ But of Israel he says, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.”

Paul knows that the rejection of the Gospel by Israel is for a great purpose, namely that you and I might be saved. But he never gives up; he will introduce us next week to the natural and unnatural branches - that natural branch will one day be grafted back in.

In fact, if you pray for Israel to come to Christ, you can be certain that prayer will one day be answered - it's foretold. But it will not necessarily happen quickly; evangelism requires patience. What Eugene Peterson calls, “Long obedience in the same direction”. Consistency of witness is one of the most under-rated aspects of ministry.

Effective Evangelism Prioritizes Prayer, Prohibits Performance, Pursues the Heart, Proclaims the Gospel, and practices patience...I want to close with the observation of a lost soul from many years ago...

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: Here is a painting by Vincent Van Gogh called, “The Book.” It would sell today for between \$45 and \$65 million dollars.

Many do know that the great Dutch Painter, Vincent Van Gogh, was the son of a godly pastor, and Van Gogh himself wanted to preach the Gospel. For a while he lived in London, and his favorite



preacher was Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Each Lord's Day, Van Gogh sat among the crowds of as many as 10 - 20 thousand people listening to Spurgeon preach the Gospel. In the evenings, Van Gogh would go down to the East End of London and work as a street preacher.

He wanted to study the Scriptures more deeply, so he went to the university at Antwerp. Sadly, he fell into a school that was very liberal in its views of scripture, and day by day, they raised questions over the authority, sufficiency, and inerrancy of the biblical text - and ultimately Van Gogh lost his confidence in God and turned to immorality.

You'd expect a great artist to paint something that reflected this change in position, and he did. He calls it "An open bible with a candlestick and a book."

- The bible had belonged to his father, a Dutch Reformed Pastor in the Netherlands...it is opened to Isa. 53.
- The candlestick is no longer burning...
- The book is an erotic pornographic novel that had been banned called, "The Girl Elisa" by Emile Zola.

INVITATION: Everyday life events, circumstances, and curiosities bring men, women, and young adults into situations where they sit before an open Bible, wondering if there are any answers.

The question is - is there a candle to illuminate their understanding?

If not, like Van Gogh, one by one, they were turned to the sensual desires of the world until they woke up one day, and it's too late.

I am asking God to light a few hundred candles today.